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DRUM TYPES
OF
EASTERN NEW GUINEA

by

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Drum Types of Eastern New Guinea

by

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In this paper an attempt is made to bring under one heading all the drum types reported in the relevant literature and those existing in the Collections of the National Museum of Victoria. A classification by means of a key is offered. It is hoped it will be suitable for use by Museum curators and private collectors, who are often faced with the problems of identification of pieces which are not localized. While no attempt has been made to discuss the magic and ceremonial connected with drum making and using, a few broad facts are given and a list of references is appended for further reading. It should be pointed out however, that this is but a preliminary survey forming the basis for further study.

The several drum types of Eastern New Guinea are recognizable by characteristics which appear to be fairly constant. Amongst the different groups of Tribes who use them the origin of these is accounted for by myths, and therefore the characteristics have become traditional, so that a certain fixity is given to any particular type.

Eastern New Guinea drums are invariably made from a suitable tree trunk or branch, which is hollowed partly by burning and partly by scraping. An exception is made from the internodes of a bamboo. Unlike some drums in other parts of the world never more than one head or tympanum is used, the opposite end being left open but often shaped to represent the open jaws of some animal, possibly the crocodile.

The tympanum is normally the skin of a lizard (*Varanus*), but at times that of a wallaby (in the south-west) or the globe fish (*Tetraodon*), on the Lower Fly River, is used. It is kept in position by means of vegetable cement, and, at times, also by a band of rattan or cane which encircles it. Pellets of beeswax are generally attached to the outside of the tympanum, the purpose of these being to control the pitch. In most regions a supply of beeswax is kept at hand by sticking it to the outside of the drum.

If a handle is present it is always cut from the solid, and forms part of the drum. Often the base of the handle is continued around the body of the drum, forming two encircling bands or rings. If a narrowing of the body, or "waist", is present the handle generally bridges it.

In parts of Eastern New Guinea the drum has to be built by the neophyte during his initiation period. In this case he makes it in a secluded spot, away from the sight of anyone, especially women. A number of other taboos may also be observed. In other parts the men make their drums in full view of all. Again, some individuals are supposed to possess the right "magic"; a drum would never have the right tone without it. In this case their reputé would travel far and wide, and add much to their social prestige and worldly wealth.

Possibly because of the scarcity of suitable timber, or for the lack of the right magic, not every drum-using tribe is capable of making drums. In this case they are imported, sometimes from quite a distance away. Natural products or manufactures of the district, such as shells, grass skirts, or food, are then given in exchange. Sometimes, as among the Kiwai, the imported drums are redecorated by scraping out the old design, and engraving a new one. Drums are not universally used in Eastern New Guinea, many Tribes not knowing them.

Explanation of terms used.

Head.—The tympanum end.

Body.—The drum between the head and open end.

Waist.—Constriction of body between head and open end.

Skirt.—The body between the waist and open end.

Open end.—The end of the drum opposite the head.

Handle.—Protruding part, cut from the solid, with which to grasp the instrument.

Base of handle.—Part of handle directly in contact with the body of the drum.

Handle bands.—Base of handle continued around or encircling body of drum.

THE TRANSFLY REGION.

The Gwaiar.

The only information we possess of this drum is from F. E. Williams. In "Papuan of the Transfly" he states that this instrument, of special interest because of its unique handle, is held by natives to represent a woman. It is of asymmetrical hour glass shape, the head being only $\frac{1}{4}$ th of its entire length which is 4 feet approximately. The most unusual feature, however, is a projecting elbow or hook, which serves as a handle. This part is called the breast. The only decoration is a long narrow ridge running from below the waist, downwards towards the open end of the drum. The ridge, referred to as the clitoris, ends in an incised long-oval mark which is known as the vulva.

Williams states that the only specimen he was allowed to examine had a mock grass skirt tied around its middle. He had great difficulty in determining its distribution, but believes that it belongs properly to the people west of the River Moorhead, (the Semariji and the Gambadi) and that it has found its way into one or two Keraki villages only as an importation.

WESTERN DIVISION.

The Warup.

This type of drum, of hour glass shape, is so distinctive in appearance that it is quite impossible to confuse it with any other instrument.

It is large and heavy, of polished black wood, has no handle and the skirt opens almost to the waist into large, gaping jaws. The lips of these jaws are often decorated with feathers, ovum shells, and rattle seeds.

The border of the upper jaw has a gentle upward curve, while the lower is cut in a straight horizontal line, with a square end. Decoration is further added by zoomorphic designs on the upper lip and on the tympanum end of the drum.

The tympanum is of *Varanus* skin, kept in position by a plaited rattan band. A variety of this drum was introduced on the west coast of Cape York Peninsula, Australia, by Torres Strait Islanders.

The Warup appears to be an old type of drum; tradition says that it came to the Lower Fly from the Island of Saibai. It has not been made for a long time, specimens being now very rare. Its place has been taken by the Dundun, (called on the Torres Strait Islands Buruburu) which was introduced from the Tugeri of Dutch New Guinea.

The Dundun or Buruburu.

This drum, of the hour glass type, is very variable in size, and specimens 4 feet long are known. The handle, of one piece with the body, is plain and continued around the body at the attachment point, forming encircling, raised bands. These bands are generally carved in high relief in bold spiral and zigzag designs, coloured red and white against the dark background. This same decoration is used on the skirt of the drum, from the lower handle band to the open end. This last detail varies a good deal, some drums having but one decorated strip near the open end. The body of the instrument is never decorated.

On the larger specimens the tympanum is often wallaby skin, the hair of which is scraped off while the skin is in its green state. The open end of the drum is left round.

The Dundun has a wide distribution, apparently having been introduced by the Tugeri (Marind-anim) from Dutch New Guinea. It is now found amongst all the Tribes from the Bensbach River to the Wiram country in the Middle Fly, down to the mouth of that river, and on to the Islands of the Torres Straits.

On the Lower Fly and the Mawata regions this drum is made locally and is also imported. The imported drums are redecorated to conform to local style by scraping off the old decoration and incising a new one. This process, by making the walls thinner, also improves the sound of the drum.

Gunnar Landtman, in "The Kiwai Papuans of British New Guinea", has given a full description of the making of this type of drum, of the Taboos to which a drum maker is subject, and of the magic used by enemies to cause the membrane of the drum to break. He also records the traditions associated with the making of the first drum.

The Worua.

This type of drum is in use amongst the Gogodara (Gaima) of the eastern banks of the Lower Fly River. It has the same general shape as the Dundun but is much narrower, and the decoration on the handle bands does not encircle the body, nor are these bands as prominent. The decoration of the skirt is also different. It consists of two large spirals, or concentric circles, one on each side of the open end. This open end is encircled by a narrow band bearing incised zigzag designs. The tympanum is generally of *Varanus* skin, glued on with the sap of a tree (Sarua). The open end is left round.

KIWAI ISLAND.

The typical drum of the Kiwai has a very shallow waist and no handle, consequently it is almost cylindrical in shape. The open end is cut in two, very often three, short jaws. The only decoration is an incised band close to the open end, and a narrow border edging the lips of the jaw. These incisions are filled with white pipe clay. The tympanum is of *Varanus* skin.

The Gama.

This drum, also in use at Dibiri, on the Bamu River, and as far east as Goaribari Island, is easily recognizable because the waist is not in the centre, but close to the open jaws. These jaws are exaggerated, the diameter being by far the largest in the whole drum. They are highly decorated with curvilinear designs in high relief and are painted red and white. They are said to represent the head and snout of a crocodile. No handle is present. The tympanum is of *Varanus* skin, glued on and further held secure by a rattan band which encircles the head.

The Waplè.

This type of drum, also in use amongst the Masingle and other bushmen of Daudai (Transfly), is of hour glass pattern and devoid of handle. The open end is circular, but has two projecting pegs, or narrow points, said to represent teeth, one on each side of the open end and opposite each other. It is seldom decorated. The tympanum is of wallaby skin.

DELTA DIVISION.

GULF OF PAPUA.

The Aopa, or Apa.

This drum is of the hour glass type. It is provided with a handle, the attachment of which is continued around the drum as two raised bands. These bands are sometimes decorated with simple geometric patterns or zigzag lines. On each side of the skirt there are generally two stylized human masks or sometimes rosettes, deeply incised; white pipe clay is rubbed in these incisions, enhancing the effect.

The open end is cut into the resemblance of open jaws, which have well marked teeth incised around the edges.

The tympanum is *Varanus* skin, glued on.

LAKE KUTUBU.

Sapo.

F. E. Williams reports, and briefly describes, a drum without handle and with the open end abruptly enlarged and left round, so as to look like the bowl of a wine glass. Decoration consists of a series of triangles (every other one with the apex pointing in the opposite direction) carved on the outer edges of the open end. This drum, which he calls "goblet type" is used only during ceremonies enacted for the curing of certain sicknesses, and his informant, he states, volunteered the opinion that it was introduced along with this cult from the Mubi via Fimaga, Segaro and Turigi.

The drum is highly valued by these people, and Williams was unable to obtain one.

CENTRAL DISTRICT.

MEKEO AND RORO.

The drums used by the Mekeo and Roro people are of the hour glass type, provided with a handle, but have no handle bands. They are characterized by the unusual shape of the waist which is the width of the handle, meeting both the skirt and the body in an abrupt step which gives the waist the appearance of being sunken.

The open end is left round, but serrated, and there are no decorations. The tympanum is of *Varanus* skin, glued on.

The drums are made by the neophytes during the initiation period, and strict taboos are then observed. They must be made in secret, and until finished the makers must not have intercourse with any men, women or children. Food is left for each neophyte at a pre-arranged spot, but at this period many foods are taboo to him, and if eaten would cause the drum to crack, to have a dull sound, to be attacked by white ants, or the membrane would split. Also, some foods would make him obese, or incapable of dancing, or give him some foul disease.

KOITA AND MOTU.

The drums here are also of hour glass type, and provided with a handle. There are no handle bands present, but midway between the bases of the handle and encircling the waist is a raised ring or band. The open end is left either round or cut into open jaws to resemble the crocodile. Possibly the two types may be used for different purposes. Some of these drums have a low raised ridge on the opposite side to the handle. This ridge is perforated, and ribbons of palm leaves are often attached.

There is no other ornamentation of any kind on either type.

The tympanum is *Varanus* skin, glued on.

THE MAFULO.

The Arive.

Information regarding this drum is taken from R. W. Williamson who gives a very good illustration of one in "The Mafulo, Mountain People of British New Guinea".

The drum, which is slightly hour glass in shape, is fitted with a handle, the two bands of which encircle the body and are raised. The end is cut into four jaws edged with teeth. The only decorations appear to be three narrow bands, edging the jaws at the open end.

The tympanum is of *Varanus* skin, glued and bound on with strips of cane.

In making the drum a modified kind of ritual is observed. The maker must climb the tree from the wood of which he intends to make his instrument, and there must remain until it is completed. He may erect a scaffold around the tree for greater comfort if he so wishes. His food is supplied to him by a female relative, and he must be sure of keeping the tympanic end of the drum always facing the wind, so that the wind gets into it and makes it musical.

THE TROBRIANDS.

I was not able to get any information regarding the drums of this locality from published sources. However, the specimens in the National Museum were obtained through the good offices of Professor Malinowsky, and, fortunately he supplied the names.

There would appear to be two sizes used, identical in shape and ornamentation. They differ completely from any other drum, and their nearest parallel is a Sepik River type which is also in the Museum collection. Identification is easy because of the small diameter of the instrument, which is entirely out of proportion to the length of the drum.

The larger of the two, the name of which is recorded as *Kupi*, is 28 inches long, and the shorter one, *Katunenia*, only 11 inches. They are tube shaped with no sign of a waist. The two extremities of the handle are continued to the ends of the drum as raised ledges. On these ledges two bird's heads with open beaks have been carved, looking outwards from the ends of the handle. A series of incised angle shaped marks connect these two heads with two more heads, also with open beaks, which are situated on the outer ends of the ledge, but looking inwards, towards the handle. Near, and on each side of the open end of the drum, there is another short ledge, perforated by a number of holes. A ribbon of dried palm leaves is tied to each of these holes.

The tympanum is *Varanus* skin, glued on with vegetable cement. The open end is enlarged, or slightly funnel shaped at the extremity, very reminiscent of the old European "blunderbuss".

NORTHERN DIVISION.

THE OROKAIVA.

We have a good description of these people, who inhabit the plains of the Northern Division, in "Orokaiva Society" by F. E. Williams. He states that they use three kinds of drums, of the same general shape. They are hollow tubes narrowing somewhat to a waist in the centre, but differing in size, and only the larger is fitted with a handle.

The Ino.

The larger drum, which has a handle, is sometimes as long as 3 feet 9 inches. The handle bands completely encircle the body. Although it could at first sight be mistaken for the Dundun of the Western Division, in reality it is very different. The Ino, even in its extreme size, is never the massive instrument of the Western People. It is also made of softer wood, is less weighty, and is never decorated with the bold patterns of the Dundun. If decoration is present at all, it is merely a shallow unpainted zigzag pattern incised on the handle bands. It differs from the Dundun in that the open end is not as large in proportion to length, and although it has a waist this is shallower. The open end is left round.

The Ehu.

This drum is devoid of handle, but retains the handle bands. These have degenerated into "handle-rings", called *Papunga*, which is also the name of the Cuscus, from the skin of whose tail finger rings are made. This drum is about 2 feet long and is used in the Si, and Paruka dances.

Saunda or Tatau.

This is the smaller type and is used in the Saunga and Puga dances. It has no handle, but like the Ehu, retains the encircling rings. This drum is, at present, confined to the Aiga, Binandele and Tain-daware Tribes, although its distribution is growing wider.

On these drums the tympanum is of lizard (*Varanus*) skin, first glued on with cooked Taro, then bound with bark cloth. The open end is left round.

MOROBE.

HUON GULF—TAMI ISLAND.

The Kam.

The drums of this region are of hour glass shape and are provided with a handle. It is, however, the ornamentation on the opposite side to the handle that distinguishes them. This decoration is an elaborate open work design, jutting out from, and often running the full length of the drum. It could at times be mistaken for a second handle, although this is not so. The surface of the body is further decorated with an incised toothed pattern often reminiscent of the jaw shaped drums of the Papuan Gulf. This design starts at the waist and the jaw shapes are directed towards, and almost reach the two ends, of the drum. Occasionally the design takes the semblance of human masks.

The tympanum of *Varanus* skin is glued on. The open end is left round.

MADANG.

ASTROLABE BAY.

The drums of this region are distinguished from the Huon Gulf variety primarily by the handles. These end in a loop, said to represent a snake, whereas the handles of the Huon Gulf drums are perfectly plain. Also, the Astrolabe drums are tubular in shape and very seldom have the semblance of a waist.

On the opposite side of the handle there is again the highly carved open-work projection, sometimes much longer than the handle. It is here meant to represent a stylized lizard or snake.

No handle bands are present, but a design is incised on two or more raised surfaces, which encircle the centre of the drum. These are always band-like and never jaw shaped. The tympanum is again of *Varanus* skin, glued on. The open end is left round, and unornamented.

RAMU RIVER.

Of the Ramu River drums little has been recorded, the exception being those in use amongst the Bosnum. These people inhabit the left bank of the Bul, a small stream which flows into the Ramu about 20 miles from its mouth. According to Elizabeth Blackwood the drums here are called *Ndin*.

The specimen in the National Museum is of hour glass shape, 24 inches long, with a simple handle terminating in 2 human masks with long beak-like noses. A slightly raised, deeply incised, handle-wide band encircles the waist. Issuing from it, and running towards both ends of the drum, are two highly stylized, incised triangular shaped human masks in high relief, giving the instrument the appearance of having open jaws, after the style of the Papuan drums. Midway between these masks and on each side of both ends, there is a short undulating raised ledge with perforations, presumably from which to hang decorations.

The tympanum is of *Varanus* skin, glued on. The open end is left round.

Miss Blackwood states that no ceremony or secrecy is attached to making this drum, which is carved in full view of everyone in the village. Preferably it is made of the soft wood of the Combom tree (unidentified).

THE SEPIK RIVER.

No definite guide can be given about localizing the drums of this vast region, as, to the knowledge of the writer, nothing has been recorded which could be of assistance for such a purpose.

Three types of drums are represented in the National Museum collections. Unfortunately no precise information is attached to these. A drum of the third type is illustrated by Raymond Firth in "Art and Life in New Guinea" and is there said to have been collected one hundred miles from the mouth of the Sepik.

First type.

Made of dense black wood, tubular in shape, 20 inches long and with no sign of a waist. The handle is cut out of a solid ledge which is continued to the ends of the drum. It is made by perforating the centre portion of this ledge so as to allow free access to the hand. On each side of the ledge and running parallel to it, though some distance away, is another ledge terminating in snake's heads. Between these last two ledges and uniting them on the underside (or opposite side to the handle) there is an incised zigzag pattern bordered by two raised bands. This is at the centre of the drum where the waist would be if one were present.

The tympanum is of *Varanus* skin, glued on. The open end is slightly funnel shaped at its extremity.

Second type.

Made of soft wood with a deep waist cut off-centre, the two ends of the drum being consequently asymmetrical. The drum is 3 feet long and elaborately incised along its full length. The handle, which is the full length of the drum, is carved to represent a wriggling snake. The tympanum is of *Varanus* skin, glued on. The open end is left round.

Third type.

This drum is of asymmetrical hour-glass type and has a wide band encircling the deep waist. This band carries a zigzag pattern in high relief. Carved out of the solid but attached to this band by the breast is a bird which forms the handle. The tail of this bird is attached to the skirt, and its beak to the body of the drum. A diamond design enclosing two circles underlies this bird.

The open end is left round and is edged by an incised band bearing a toothed design. The tympanum of this drum, the only specimen of this type in the National Museum, has unfortunately been lost. The drum illustrated by Raymond Firth is of this type, and is complete with the tympanum. While it is impossible to judge by the illustration the nature of this, the method of its attachment is clearly visible. It is laced on to a rattan band encircling the body half way down its length. This rattan band is kept in position, or tightened, by means of wooden wedges. To the writers knowledge this way of securing the tympanum is unique in Eastern New Guinea.

BAMBU DRUMS.

On page 325 of "The Kiway Papuans of British New Guinea" Gunnar Landtman writes, "While practising their wicked art sorcerers are in the habit of performing certain dances, either alone or with their wives, or several of them together. They are dressed in leaves and branches on these occasions and wear wooden masks. A particular instrument of these machinations is a small drum (Wadúrugáma) of bamboo (Wadúru) with a membrane glued over one end; these are employed in order not to produce too much noise."

Not having seen this type of drum, or an illustration of it, the Author mentions it only for the sake of completeness.

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DESCRIPTION OF PLATE I.

1. Kam Huon Gulf (after T. Bodrogi).
2. Astrolabe Bay (after L. Biro).
3. Arive, Mafulo people (after R. W. Williamson).
4. Warup, Western Division and Straits.
5. Dundun, Western Division.
6. Waple, Lower Fly River and Transtly.
7. Kiwai Island.
8. Gama, Lower Fly River.
9. Worua, Western Division.
(4-9 after G. Landtman).

DESCRIPTION OF PLATE II.

1. Ehu, Orokaiva.
2. Ndin, Ramu River.
3. Kupi, Trobriand Islands.
4. Central District, Koita and Motu.
5. Aopa, Gulf of Papua.
6. Sepik River, 3rd type.
(1-6 National Museum collection).

Description.	Native Name.	Locality.
A. With Handle.		
(1) Handle nearly full length of body.		
(a) No waist, diameter small in comparison with length over 15" under 15"	KUPI KATUNENIA	Trobriands
(b) Side ridges full length of body. No waist		
(c) No side ridges, waist not in centre		
(2) Handle not nearly full length of body.		
Elaborate carved projection on opposite side.		Sepik River
(a) Handle simple, shallow waist		
(b) Handle ending in loops, no waist	KAM	Huon Gulf
(3) Handle not nearly full length of body.		Astrolabe Bay
No carved projection on opposite side.		
(a) Masks at ends of handle		
(b) Simple handle. 2 handle bands—wide open end	NDIN	Ramu River
(c) Simple handle. 2 handle bands—narrow open end	DUNDUN	Western Division
(d) Simple handle. 2 handle bands—not decorated	WORUA	Western Division
(e) Simple handle. 2 handle bands—2 open jaws	INO	Orokaiva
(f) Simple handle. 2 handle bands—4 open jaws	AOPA	Gulf of Papua
(g) Simple handle. 1 handle band	ARIVE	Mafulo
(h) Simple handle. No handle bands. Sunken waist		Central District
		Mekeo
	GWAJAR	Transfly
B. Half Handle or Elbow		
C. Without Handle.		
(1) With handle bands	EHU and TATAU	Orokaiva
(2) Without handle bands.		
(a) Waist in Centre.		
1. Open end large. 2 open jaws	WARUP	Western Division and Straits
2. Open end small.		
(a) 3 open jaws		
(b) projecting pegs at open end	WAPLE	Lower Fly River
		Lower Fly River and Transfly
(b) Waist at base of open end.		
1. Open end large, 2 open jaws	GAMA	Lower Fly River
2. Open end large, wine glass type	SAPO	Lake Katubu
	WADURU-	Kiwai Island
D. Made of Bamboo	GAMA	



Plate I.
Drum Types of Eastern New Guinea.



1



2



3



4



5



6

Plate II.
Drum Types of Eastern New Guinea.

